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CELEBRATING



ALBERTA'S  
FAMILIES

## Conference Report

*The Lieutenant-  
Governor's  
Conference*

*Celebrating  
Alberta's  
Families*

**May 15, 1990**



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NOV 27 1990

CELEBRATING

ALBERTA'S  
FAMILIES

## A Celebration of Families

*Join hands and celebrate in song  
For families make this province strong.  
Take time together, time to share,  
Show each other that you care.*

*Families are the place to learn:  
Kindness, caring and concern.  
Teach us well and make us strong,  
To the future we belong.*

*Families give this land its heart,  
Here is where we get our start,  
Be as you would have us be,  
Light the world for all to see.*

Produced for The Lieutenant-Governor's Conference -  
Celebrating Alberta's Families, February 1990.

## Conference Report

**The Lieutenant-  
Governor's  
Conference**

**Celebrating  
Alberta's  
Families**

**May 15, 1990**

The logo symbolizes the strength and unity that come through love and commitment in families. The dynamic nature of family relationships in a changing environment is like the interplay of patterns and colours in the kaleidoscope. Each colour quadrant reflects the uniqueness of family members connected through caring, the heart holds a part of each to create the whole. The four corners are metaphors for the different forms of support needed by all families to grow and thrive.

NOV 2 1990

# Introduction

The purpose of this study is to investigate the effects of the proposed changes on the system. The study will be conducted in three phases: a preliminary study, a detailed study, and a final study.

The preliminary study will be conducted to determine the scope of the study. The detailed study will be conducted to determine the effects of the proposed changes on the system. The final study will be conducted to determine the results of the study.

The results of the study will be presented in a report. The report will contain the following information: a summary of the study, a description of the system, a description of the proposed changes, a description of the study, and a description of the results of the study.

The study will be conducted in accordance with the following schedule: a preliminary study, a detailed study, and a final study.



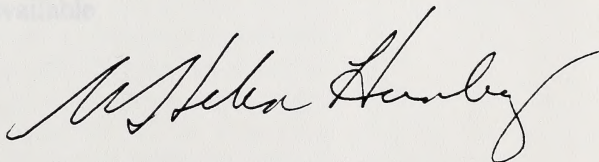
## **Message from The Lieutenant-Governor of Alberta**

Strong, dynamic families are fundamentally important to a strong, dynamic province. Alberta was built by resourceful individuals, with a tradition of hard work, enterprise and a deep concern for human values. As the 21st century approaches, these qualities which are nurtured in strong families are essential to meeting the challenges of the future.

It is in recognition of the importance of families to the future of this province that I proposed this conference which provided the forum for developing the Agenda for Action for the Premier's Council in Support of Alberta Families. This conference was an important beginning to the process of obtaining a broad range of opinions and input from across the province. It is indeed remarkable that the diversity of participants attending the conference was able to develop a consensus on the important issues for families today and for the future.

Conference participants, from all walks of life, brought the breadth and depth of their experience and were a powerful force in determining the direction and outcome for the conference. The result is this report which summarizes conference results and outlines the focus for the future.

I am very pleased to have spearheaded this important event. I anticipate your continued investment and involvement in continuing what was started here. Together we can create a future where families can thrive.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "W. Helen Hunley". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, sweeping "H" and "L".

**The Honourable W. Helen Hunley  
Lieutenant-Governor of Alberta**

## Message from The Lieutenant Governor of Alberta

Strong, dynamic families are fundamentally important to a strong, dynamic province. Alberta was built by resourceful individuals with a tradition of hard work, enterprise and a deep concern for human values. At the 1987 family symposium, these qualities which are central to strong families are essential to meeting the challenges of the future.

It is in recognition of the importance of families to the future of this province that I proposed this conference which provided the forum for developing the Agenda for Action for the Premier's Council in support of Alberta Families. This conference was an important beginning to the process of defining a broad range of options and goals for the future. It is indeed remarkable that the diversity of participants attending this conference was able to develop a consensus on the important issues for families today and for the future.

Conference participants from all walks of life brought the breadth and depth of their experience and gave a powerful force in determining the direction and content of the conference. The result is this report which summarizes the recommendations and outlines the plan for the future.

I am very pleased to have presided at this important event. I anticipate your continued involvement and investment in continuing what was started here. Together we can create a better future for all.

The Honourable W. Helen Hussey  
Lieutenant Governor of Alberta



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## Executive Summary

*The Lieutenant-Governor's Conference - Celebrating Alberta's Families* and the *Premier's Council in Support of Alberta Families* were announced in The Speech from the Throne in February 1989, as part of a series of initiatives for families. The conference, together with the Premier's Council, established the mechanism to start the dialogue with and among Albertans about effective solutions to the complex issues facing Alberta families today and into the future.

It was thus that about 500 Albertans came together on February 19 - 21, in Edmonton, bringing varied perspectives to the discussions regarding Alberta families, and to identify a series of key issues needing further dialogue and exploration. They were a diverse group of Albertans, representing the business community, churches, city and town councils, improvement districts, a wide array of professional and advocacy groups, Indians, Metis, youth, immigrants, women's groups, agencies, educational institutions, all levels of government and the general public.

The conference was held under the patronage of The Honourable W. Helen Hunley and planned under her guidance, to develop an Agenda for Action for the Premier's Council in Support of Alberta Families to be discussed more fully with Albertans. The conference also was designed to increase awareness and understanding of the family and its functions in the 1990's; identify significant challenges that families face within the context of a changing Alberta society; provide an opportunity for debate and dialogue and to celebrate, enhance and support the family.

Families in Alberta are diverse and are changing in some significant - ways. There is also remarkable

*"In proposing this conference, it was my explicit wish that the delegates attending represent a broad range of interests. This is necessary because the issues facing families are diverse and require a range of perspectives in proposing effective approaches and solutions.*

*No one has all the answers. Promoting strong families, helping them stay together and cope with challenges and stress are shared responsibilities - a partnership of individuals, families, communities, and governments in Alberta.*

*And, it is in the spirit of that partnership that I believe we must work cooperatively to continue to build on our strengths."*

*- The Honourable W. Helen Hunley*

*Lieutenant-Governor of Alberta*



*"In fact if any single word could be used to characterize families in Canada today, that word would be DIVERSITY.*

*...But there is also remarkable continuity. Families continue to be valued by us as individuals and by society for many of the same reasons they always have. Families are places for caring, for sharing across generations, for having babies, and for intimacy."*

*-Susan A. McDaniel,  
Sociologist, U. of A.*

continuity. Conference participants were provided an opportunity to explore both the diversity and continuity, in order to increase their awareness and understanding of the family and its function in the 1990's through study papers distributed prior to the conference, by attending plenary sessions and workshops and through debate and dialogue with other delegates in nine major topic areas:

- A. *Balancing Work and Family Life,*
- B. *Families and the Community,*
- C. *Supporting and Strengthening Families,*
- D. *Learning for Living - Strategies for Promoting Family Development,*
- E. *Financial Health and Families,*
- F. *Health and Families,*
- G. *Families and the Education System,*
- H. *Families and Leisure, and*
- I. *Families and the Law.*

Delegates then met to discuss and debate their selected topic area in study groups, and identified a total of 77 issues of priority which, in their view, needed further dialogue and exploration by all Albertans. With further consolidation as a result of overlap among issues in the same study area, 48 priority issues were identified.

In assessing all of the issues, eight themes emerged that cut across all study groups. These themes form the basis for the Agenda for Action for the Premier's Council in Support of Alberta Families to discuss with Albertans. The Agenda also provides a focus for individual Albertans, community groups and interested parties to examine, within the context of their own mission and objectives.

The Agenda for Action that the Premier's Council will now probe and examine in more detail with

Albertans throughout the province is highlighted as follows:

- 1. How can we best foster cultural values that match the current and future social environment so that families can thrive?**
- 2. How best do we address the desire to give attention to more preventive services for families without jeopardizing the necessary rehabilitative and treatment services?**
- 3. What mechanisms and workplace supports must we put in place to make it easier for Albertans and Alberta families to have a balance of work, leisure and family responsibilities?**
- 4. How best can we create a social consensus which will assist communities, service agencies, and all levels of government to work cooperatively towards a common goal of supporting families?**
- 5. How should the systems which impact families respond to address changing realities and ensure that policies support and strengthen families?**
- 6. How can we invest energy and resources in the empowerment of communities in their essential role in supporting families?**
- 7. To what extent can we create an environment where Albertans are open to change and growth, and seek out opportunities for lifelong learning so that they can function effectively in a changing environment?**
- 8. How best can we ensure that families have the skills and financial health they need, in order to be strong and successful?**

*"This conference was planned, not as an end in itself, but as a beginning. A beginning that involves all Albertans. It is the beginning of a renewal that will strengthen our families and our future.*

*...It is a transition that demands that we reflect on the very meaning and role of families in our lives today. And it demands that we develop a new partnership - a new partnership based on unity, based on trust and commitment and working together in harmony."*

*-John Oldring,  
Minister,*

*Alberta Family and  
Social Services*



*"If we want to turn  
society around in support  
of families, we each have  
to start*

*...with our own family, -*

*In our own home, -*

*With our own friends, -*

*In our own communities, -*

*And with the help of the  
supporting agencies that  
are already in place..."*

*-Jean Forest,*

*Conference*

*Co-chairperson*

Clearly, these issues will not be solved with quick fix, band-aid approaches. Potential solutions in one area must be examined to make sure they do not create unintended negative consequences on families in other areas. The major systems which affect families are interrelated and interdependent. The health system, the education system, workplaces and the economic system, the social services system and the recreational system provide services to families. It is the interdependency of all of these systems that make the process of change complex.

The issues do not lend themselves to technical solutions. Ethical, value-based decision-making is required to choose from among several viable options, those which will yield the most effective solutions. We need the collective wisdom of individuals, families, communities, businesses, professionals and governments.

We have embarked upon an exciting journey. It is appropriate, as we approach the turn of the century, to use a decision-making strategy that involves participation of citizens. Everyone has a stake in resolving the issues of our society that are disruptive to families and to effective family functioning.

Although this approach takes longer at the beginning, the opportunity for all Albertans to provide their input enables support for and investment in successful, long-lasting solutions.

As we look at ways to make change and improvements, we must acknowledge those things which are already working well. There are many families in Alberta that are strong, successful families. There are solutions and programs already in existence which are highly effective. We need to nurture these initiatives and learn from them. We

must celebrate the successful efforts which have contributed to making the province a better, more prosperous place for families. We must build on these past successes as we search for solutions to the challenges ahead.

*"Came to the conference feeling angry and somewhat negative - am leaving conference with a great deal of hope for the future for families and communities. Let's all work together as a whole family and make it all come about better."*  
-Conference participant.

If you would like to write to the Premier's Council in Support of Alberta Families, to comment on this report or provide ideas and comments about Alberta families, please send them to:

Mr. Stockwell Day, M.L.A.

Chairman, Premier's Council in Support of Alberta Families

513 Legislature Building

Edmonton, Alberta

T5K 2B6

Members of the Premier's Council in Support of Alberta Families:

Pearl Calahasen, M.L.A., Lesser Slave Lake

Carolyn Pettifer, Edmonton

Paulette Patterson, Grande Prairie

Denis Martin, Mallaig

Deanna Audrey Johnson, Endiang

Dr. Stephen Genuis, Sherwood Park

Margaret Alexander, Lethbridge

Rev. David Paterson, Medicine Hat

Renee D'Amour, Calgary

Gerald Mertick, Calgary

Sandi Scott, Calgary



## 1. Introduction

***"In proposing this conference, it was my explicit wish that the delegates attending represent a broad range of interests. This is necessary because the issues facing families are diverse and require a range of perspectives in proposing effective approaches and solutions.***

***No one has all the answers. Promoting strong families, helping them stay together and cope with challenges and stress are shared responsibilities - a partnership of individuals, families, communities, and governments in Alberta.***

***And, it is in the spirit of that partnership that I believe we must work cooperatively to continue to build on our strengths."***

With these words from The Honourable W. Helen Hunley, Lieutenant-Governor of Alberta, began a unique conference, held in Edmonton on February 19, 20 & 21, 1990.

The conference itself began a process of discussions with Albertans throughout the province, to explore strategies for strengthening all families.

Delegates from across the province who attended the conference identified a series of priority issues that are critical to ensuring a nourishing and supportive environment for Alberta families. These priority issues will now be the basis for further discussion and debate throughout the province as Albertans together search for effective solutions to the issues facing Alberta families today and into the future.

***"Alberta is founded on our families.***

***...I believe in Alberta's families. I believe that their strength and vitality is a measure of our ability to succeed in the future.***

***And I believe that together we can effectively help our families meet any challenge in the future"***

***-The Honourable  
W. Helen Hunley***

*"The lifestyles, values and expectations of Albertans have changed as well, reflecting world-wide changes in how people live. The traditional picture of Alberta in many ways no longer applies. We too are faced with contradictions between the traditional picture and the reality of how people live. The family continues to be the basic unit of our society - it forms our foundation and provides our stability. However, the traditional view of the two-parent, two-child family - where the father is the sole wage earner, while the mother runs the household - is no longer accurate."*

*- "Caring and Responsibility - A Statement of Social Policy for Alberta."*

This document is a record of the conference. It is also a discussion document for Albertans - at - large. It describes the Agenda for Action for the Premier's Council in Support of Alberta Families, whose mandate is to probe the issues further with people throughout the province. The Agenda also provides a focus for individual Albertans, community groups and interested parties to examine, within the context of their own mission and objectives, and together to find ways to strengthen and support families.

The document describes the most critical issues facing Alberta families today, as seen by conference attendees. It is these issues which provide the basis for the Agenda. This document, together with the ten study papers developed as background information for conference delegates, will assist Albertans in formulating their thoughts and opinions about long range directions.

In developing long range directions, Albertans must reflect on several issues. Both the current status, and the historical situation for families need to be examined as objectively as possible. This must be done in the context of the strengths and limitations of our social and economic environment.

What is our vision of the future? What role do we see for families? How best can we create a social consensus and shift our economic environment to a world where families find it easy to be strong and successful? These are key questions to be answered through the discussions with the Premier's Council.

The most effective solutions will be those that recognize and embody the underlying changes in our society. Our current world is a world of change. Families are more diverse. We are subject to global forces that are changing the basis of our social relationships. We are gaining new understanding of

relationships and patterns in our physical universe. Our evolution from an industrial age to an information age is requiring us to shift our perspectives and challenge former beliefs.

Clearly, the issues will not be solved with quick fix, band-aid approaches. Potential solutions in one area must be examined to make sure they do not create unintended negative consequences on families in other areas.

We are beginning to understand that the major systems which affect families are interrelated and interdependent. The health system, the education system, the economic system, the social services system and the recreational system provide services to families. These systems depend on the family and on each other to provide necessary resources for their own success.

The health system depends on families and communities for care of dependents, some of whom would otherwise be institutionalized. Our physical health is affected by our emotional and spiritual health, which is found in our family support.

Families obtain financial resources as a result of participation in the labour force. The economic viability of our province depends on a productive business sector. To be productive, workplaces depend on healthy, skilled, knowledgeable employees.

It is the interdependency of all of these systems that makes the process of change complex.

We have embarked upon an exciting journey. It is appropriate, as we approach the turn of the century, to use a decision-making strategy that involves participation of citizens. Everyone has a stake in resolving the issues of our society that are disruptive

*This, I suggest, is the icon, the fundamental image of the industrial world -*



*it's the way we lay out our streets -*

*it's the organization charts we all work in -*

*it's a highrise building, a classroom -*

*... and it's starting to dawn on us that this way of organizing ourselves has no future."*

*-Ruben Nelson, Futurist and Strategist*



to families and to effective family functioning. The issues do not lend themselves to technical solutions. Ethical, value-based decision-making is required, to choose from among several viable options, those which will yield the most effective solutions.

Although this approach takes longer at the beginning, the opportunity for all Albertans to provide their input enables support for and investment in successful, long-lasting solutions. Individuals, families, communities, businesses, professionals, and governments in Alberta must all contribute their thoughts and their wisdom to developing solutions.

We will need this collective wisdom to create a world where every family is dedicated to promoting the welfare and happiness of each of its members, to showing appreciation for each other frequently and spending sufficient quality time together. We need to support families in developing a sense of a greater good, in order to provide family members with strength and purpose. We need to create a world where families are able to view stress or crisis as an opportunity to grow (Stinnett and DeFrain - characteristics of strong families).

As we embark on the journey, we must keep in mind the broader societal perspectives that either hinder or support family functioning. As Ruben Nelson said in his address to the conference, *"Your job is not problem solving. Families are not a problem to be solved - they're both a fact of life, and at times a curse - but families are mostly a wondrous blessing, and our job is to find the conditions within which that can be true."*

As we look at ways to make change and improvements, we must acknowledge those things which are already working well. There are many families in Alberta that are strong, successful families. There are solutions and programs already

*"A myth is something that has never happened, but we believe is happening all the time. Joseph Campbell has described how we break myths - 'We will not change our great organizing myths until our pain becomes too great and then we will collectively allow the formation of new and useful myths ... If enough of us change collectively then we take on the energy of that collective change and the myth breaks apart.'"*

*-Joyce Irvine, Social Worker and Family Therapist*

in existence which are highly effective. We need to nurture and learn from these initiatives. We must celebrate the successful efforts which have contributed to making the province a better, more prosperous place for families. We must build on these past successes as we search for solutions to the challenges ahead.

*"The family in all its varied forms, is the heart and soul of this province. The viability of the family is the viability of this province...and the future of the family is the future of the province.*

*You therefore have an important mission here and I wish you well."*

*-The Honourable  
W. Helen Hunley*

*"Families are the cornerstone of our society where we learn our values, nurture our sense of health and develop the skills with which we live our lives.*

*Nothing we do as a government can be more important than nourishing and supporting Alberta's families in all their diverse forms."*

*-Honourable Don R. Getty, Premier of Alberta*

## 2. The Conference

*The Lieutenant-Governor's Conference - Celebrating Alberta's Families* was announced in The Speech from the Throne (February 1989) as one of a series of initiatives for families; these included the establishment of:

- Family Day,
- The Premier's Council in Support of Alberta Families,
- The Alberta Family Life and Drug Abuse Foundation, and
- The Community Facility Enhancement Program.

In addition, The Speech from the Throne announced the enhancement of existing programs to support families, including in-home support services for families which are at serious risk; family shelters to combat family violence; treatment services for families and children suffering from emotional and mental health problems; the Alberta Maintenance Enforcement Program; and Day Care. The government outlined its commitment to assuring that families remain strong and that those in crisis receive the support of a caring society.

These initiatives are undertaken within the context of *Caring and Responsibility - A Statement of Social Policy for Alberta*, which outlines the leadership role for government in relation to social policies as follows:

*"The Government of Alberta recognizes that social and economic development are inseparable. It is committed to building on our tradition of caring for each other and ensuring a quality of life in which all Albertans can participate democratically and share fully on equal terms in the rich cultural, economic, and social diversity of their province and in its*



future development.

The government will provide the necessary leadership and overall responsibility for provincial social policies and will provide support and resources to create an environment in which Albertans can work together, be self-reliant, and take responsibility for their own lives, their families and their communities.

Government policies and programs will be designed to promote cooperative and independent initiatives of individual Albertans while at the same time ensuring that those who, for a variety of reasons, must depend on social programs for support are able to live dignified and meaningful lives."

Within this context, the conference was held under the patronage of The Honourable W. Helen Hunley, Lieutenant-Governor of Alberta, and was planned under her guidance to address the following objectives:

- to build awareness and understanding of the family and its functions in the 1990's;
- to identify significant challenges that face families within the context of a changing Alberta society;
- to provide an opportunity for debate and dialogue on family matters;
- to provide an opportunity to celebrate, enhance and support the family; and
- to develop an Agenda for Action, through identification of a series of key issues needing further dialogue and exploration, for the Premier's Council in Support of Alberta Families to discuss more broadly with Albertans.

The conference was kicked off with a Family Fair for the general public, which was planned in celebration of Family Day and designed to provide information about services available to families. The Family Fair attracted about 25,000 people, and served to heighten awareness and provide an opportunity to celebrate,

*"We, as Albertans, have always been resourceful and confident in our strength, and proud of our heritage.*

*Alberta's families have always been renowned for their spirit and courage. It is these qualities that will allow us to move into the next decade with confidence."*

*-The Honourable  
W. Helen Hunley*

*"Not only did I get to voice my opinions, I learned ... and felt our proposals were valid and useful."*

*-Conference participant*

*"Needed more time for workshops; more chances to attend different workshops."*

*-Conference participant*

*"Too bad we couldn't take them all (workshops), or at least more of them."*

*-Conference participant*

enhance and support families.

About 500 Albertans came together on February 19 - 21, in Edmonton, bringing varied perspectives to the discussions regarding Alberta families, and to develop the agenda for the Premier's Council. They were a diverse group of Albertans, nominated by their organizations as a result of their demonstrated interest in and commitment to families.

Delegates represented the business community, churches, city and town councils, improvement districts, a wide array of professional and advocacy groups, Indians, Métis, youth, immigrants, women's groups, agencies, educational institutions, all levels of government and the general public.

Prior to the conference, delegates received two background papers - one describing the changing family and the other related to the study group of their choice.

Conference participants were provided an opportunity to increase their awareness and understanding of the family and its function in the 1990's through the study papers, by attending plenary sessions and workshops and through debate and dialogue with other delegates. Thirty-six speakers and panelists presented information in plenary sessions and in workshops.

Delegates could select two of the 20 workshops available. The workshops were on a wide diversity of topics related to the study groups. Delegates listened to presentations by experts from across Alberta and Canada, to obtain information related to their selected study group.

The workshop sessions and study papers provided much food for thought. This information will also be

useful to Albertans in formulating their thoughts and opinions about long range directions.

Study groups provided delegates with an opportunity to join with others in an examination of their selected topic areas. The study groups were:

- A. *Balancing Work and Family Life,*
- B. *Families and the Community,*
- C. *Supporting and Strengthening Families,*
- D. *Learning for Living - Strategies for Promoting Family Development,*
- E. *Financial Health and Families,*
- F. *Health and Families,*
- G. *Families and the Education System,*
- H. *Families and Leisure, and*
- I. *Families and the Law.*

The purpose of the study groups was to identify the priority issues for Alberta families in each of these nine areas. The priority issues would then form the basis of the Agenda for Action for the Premier's Council in Support of Alberta Families.

It is important to recognize the strengths and limitations of such a process. Conference attendees were asked to identify key issues in a fairly short period of time. The broad diversity, however, brought the richness of many perspectives, and thus a comfort that the issues identified were relevant for a broad cross-section of Albertans.

The time allocated to analyze issues at the conference was of necessity short, which meant that the issues did not have the benefit of a thorough assessment. This conference, however, was intended to provide a starting place, a jump-off-point for wider discussions. The discussions with Albertans

*"I appreciated the way our study group participants listened to each other's points of view and worked hard to represent a variety of wide ranging concerns and solutions for them."*

*-Conference participant*

*"Because of the divergence of personal views and special interests it became impossible within the time frame to discuss all of them."*

*-Conference participant*



*"I hope we may pull the groups in our community together to discuss the benefits of family support in every aspect."*

*-Conference participant*

*"Very good exercise! Not in futility I hope!"*

*-Conference participant*

*"Came to conference feeling angry and somewhat negative - am leaving conference with a great deal of hope for the future for families and communities. Let's all work together as a whole family and make it all come about better."*

*-Conference participant*

throughout the province which follow the conference will allow further examination of the issues as well as debate on options and strategies for their resolution.

### **What was accomplished**

A description of the outcomes of the study groups is outlined in the remainder of this report. About 90% of those participants who answered the evaluation questionnaire (about half the delegates) rated it as satisfactory to excellent.

Although several delegates admitted that they initially reacted to the imposed discussion process, most went on to say that they had their most beneficial experience in the study groups. Almost all expressed the hope that the results of these discussions would be used, and that the exercise would not prove to be a futile one.

Several participants said they would take action in their own communities and would discuss their experiences and the findings of the conference with their own organizations. The further exploration of issues and themes, within the context of the mission and objectives of these groups will begin to spread the discussion throughout Alberta. This supports the objectives of the Premier's Council in Support of Alberta Families, as well as the conference objective that responsibility for action will not be undertaken solely by government.

### 3. Families in Alberta

Families in Alberta are changing in some significant ways. These changes were addressed in the ten study papers provided to conference delegates and highlighted here.

The question of definition always emerges when families are discussed. Various authors have put forward definitions to describe their particular perspective. The general spirit expressed at the conference was to embrace a wide diversity of family forms. As Dr. McDaniel indicated in her study paper, *"In fact if any single word could be used to characterize families in Canada today, that word would be DIVERSITY"*. Some cautioned that attempting to define 'family' could do more harm from being exclusionary than it would do good.

However, unless a definition of family is needed within the context of a program or service, the struggle may be largely an academic problem. As Margaret Eichler, a well known Canadian researcher in the field of sociology notes, *"Nevertheless, in spite of the difficulty of coming up with a good cut-and-dried definition of the family, if we ask ourselves, or anybody else, who is their family, most people will be able to give a clear and unambiguous answer. For instance, they may say, 'my family consists of my spouse, my children, my parents and Aunt Sally.' However, they may not list Uncle Herbert, because there is very little interaction with him."*

Within the context of the conference, families were defined in terms of what they do for society:

1. Physical maintenance and care of family members.
2. Having and rearing children through

*"By looking at what families do we are forced to see family as an open system, interacting continually with society and its systems and institutions. We're saying that families can no longer be viewed as largely closed or private systems. They are part of public life, they function in the public interest and they need a supportive and understanding public."*

-Alan Mirabelli,  
Vanier Institute on the Family

procreation or adoption.

3. Socializing children for adult roles.
4. Maintaining social order within the family and groups external to it.
5. Producing and consuming goods and services.
6. Maintaining family morale and motivation to ensure task performance both within the family and other social groups.

### What is the situation for Alberta families now?

*"Even though there is change in families today, there is also remarkable continuity."*

*"There is no evidence to suggest that poverty, family violence and sexual abuse are new to Canadian families."*

*-Susan McDaniel,  
Sociologist, U. of A.*

The family continues to form our foundation and provides our stability. But our family and social lives are very different from what they were in previous generations. Social and economic changes in Alberta have affected and are continuing to affect the family. Strong, healthy families manage and adapt to social and economic changes very well. Other families, with different strengths and capacities, find those changes very stressful for family life.

One major result of the economic and social changes is the diversity and complexity of family structures. Today the family can mean blended families, remarried families, single parent families, multi-generational families, as well as two parent families. The following are examples of some of the changes in family form and structure and some of the challenges facing Alberta's families. More complete information is available in the complete set of study papers prepared for the conference.

### FAMILIES, MARRIAGE & DIVORCE

- In 1986, Alberta was home to 616,320 families. The vast majority (88.2%) were husband-wife families.



- The number of marriages in Alberta rose to a peak of about 22,000 in 1981 and declined to about 19,000 in 1986. Between the 1981 and the 1986 Census in Canada, common law unions rose by 37%, while marriages increased by only 3%.
- The divorce rate has increased. An estimated one quarter of 1974 marriages had ended in divorce by 1986. More than 40% of Alberta marriages are now ending in divorce. An increasing proportion of marriages involve one partner who had been previously divorced. By 1986, this was the case in one of three marriages.

## CHILDREN

- Families with children, as a proportion of all families, have declined from historical levels, and have remained at 67% since 1981. This is the lowest level in Alberta's recorded history. Slightly less than half of Alberta families (288,710 families) have children under the age of 18. In the past 20 years, the proportion of husband-wife couples with no children at home has doubled.
- Of the families with children under eighteen, 18% were headed by a lone parent. The rate of single parenthood in Canada has dropped slightly. There is a lower proportion of single parents than in 1941, and about the same proportion of single parents as in 1951.
- In 42% of families, one parent stays home to care for the children. About 46% use private child care arrangements with friends, relatives, baby-sitters or nannies. The remaining 12% use the government supported day care system. About 37,000 of the 242,000 Alberta children aged 6 to 12 in 1986 were probably "latchkey" children during non-school hours.

*"In Canada in the mid-19th century, at the time of rapid industrialization and urbanization, public leaders saw the family as being in peril. Many of the same concerns about family were expressed about the instability of the family and the need to return to old values."*

*-Chad Gaffield,  
Historian, Univ. of  
Ottawa*

*"It is interesting, though, as we look to the future, to recall the past. Over 2000 years ago Plato wrote 'The nation and the family walk hand in hand. As goes the family, so goes the nation.' This unique interconnection is evident all around us today. Alberta families are changing and as a result, so is our society. Within the span of one generation our society has undergone considerable transition. It is a transition that demands that we reflect on the very meaning and role of families in our lives today."*

*-John Oldring,  
Minister,*

*Alberta Family and  
Social Services*

## FAMILY INCOME

- From a financial perspective, Alberta families are for the most part rather prosperous. Two thirds are in the middle and upper class, earning more than \$30,000 per year, with the average family income in 1985 being \$44,197. However, in 1981 dollars, this average family income was below the 1981 level.
- The proportion of Alberta families earning less than \$10,000 per year declined from 6.6% in 1981 to 3.8% in 1986, while the proportion earning more than \$45,000 increased from 24.3 to 39.3%.
- In 1986, almost 150,000 Alberta households (about one in five households) were at or below the poverty line. Each month in 1989/90, an average of more than 67,000 Alberta households covering about 150,000 Albertans received Social Allowance.
- About another 20% of Alberta households would be classified as 'near poor', being within 20% of the poverty line. The working poor in Alberta number about 29,000 families (those whose household adult members did not, between them, have at least 49 weeks of either full-time or part-time work during the year).
- About one in six (93,000, or 15.3%) of Alberta's children live in poverty (1986 figures). This is slightly better than the Canadian average (17.6%) and slightly worse than Ontario's rate (13.4%).

## HEALTH

- Health of family members is one of the important resources of families. The average life expectancy has increased for both males and females, and thus the number of years they will

contribute to families. However, those with higher education and income levels can expect to live longer than those with the lowest socioeconomic status.

- Early death robs Alberta families of the support and caring they might expect from family members. Those Albertans who died in 1987 of early death (i.e., death before 70 years) lost a total of 84,000 potential years of life from four causes alone - cardiovascular disease, cancer, accidents and suicide. Alberta families therefore lost 84,000 years of contributing family members, in many cases from deaths that could have been prevented or delayed.

## EDUCATION

- As of 1986/87, 35% of Albertans 15 years of age and over were high school graduates - the largest proportion of adults of any province. Alberta also had the highest proportion of people with university degrees or certificates (13%). On the other hand, only 20% of Native students finish high school compared with a national average of 70%.

While there is without doubt change in families today, there is also remarkable continuity. Dr. McDaniel points out that *"families continue to be valued by us as individuals and by society for many of the same reasons they always have. Families are places for caring, for sharing across generations, for having babies and for intimacy."*

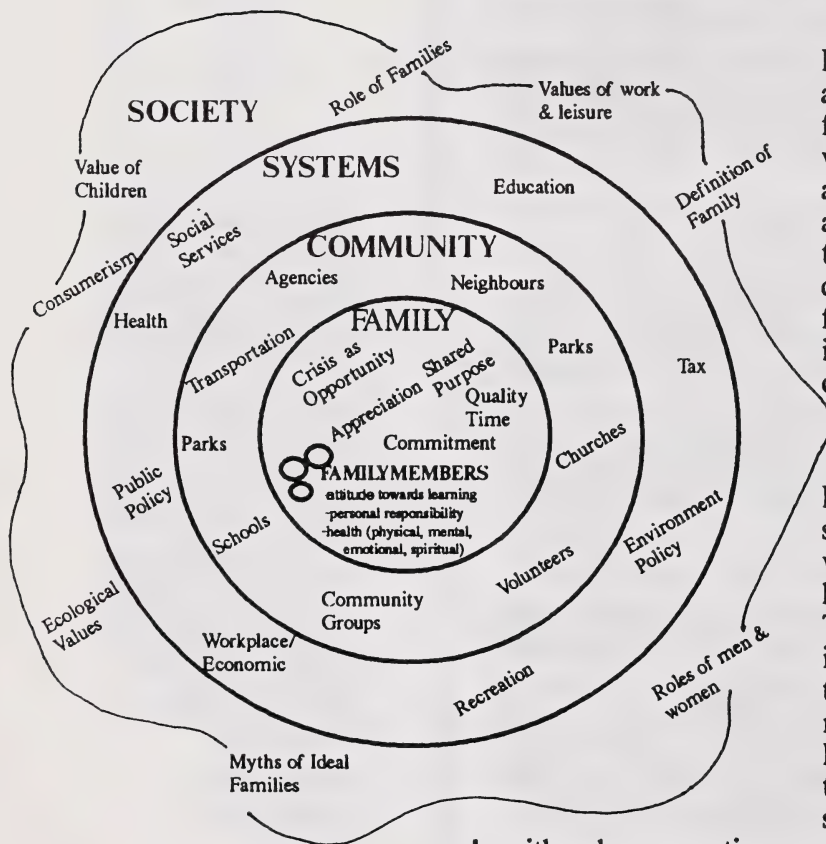
*"So we're looking to the future ... we can think of it as new territory that we're moving out into. The future is the context for the rest of our lives and for the families we care for so much. And, like taking any journey, if we pack inappropriately, if we think the land is something other than it is, then the land wins and we lose. In the long run we have to shape our lives according to where we are in history."*

*-Ruben Nelson,  
Futurist and  
Strategist*



#### 4. The Critical Issues Facing Alberta Families: Study Group Results

In looking at the issues which were given priority by the study groups, it may be helpful to assess them from the perspective of a model which illustrates the relationship of the individual and the family to the rest of society.



Individual family members are ultimately responsible for themselves and their well being, being accountable for themselves and acting responsibly toward others. These qualities are nurtured in families who have a critical influence in preparing children for life in the world.

Families, in turn, need the support of communities who, in turn, depend on healthy individuals. Therefore, there is a strong interrelationship between the two, in stimulating and reinforcing each other. Families and communities thrive within a context of societal values that can

either be supporting or limiting. These values are reflected in the legislation, policies and programs that are designed to support and assist families.

The delegates met in study groups to discuss and debate their specific study group topics. Their task was to identify the issues of priority which, in their view, needed to be addressed by the Premier's Council in Support of Alberta Families. A summary of all of the issues is presented here. It is these issues which provide the basis for the Agenda for Action.

A total of 23 study groups in the nine areas met during the conference. Delegates listed all of the issues of concern to them in their selected topic areas. After reaching consensus on the issues of highest priority, group members examined these priority issues in more depth. The implications for Alberta if these issues were not resolved, the benefits if they were, and some potential solutions were discussed. The number of priority issues selected for further discussions varied in each group.

Detailed reports of issues developed by each of the study groups are presented in Appendix B.

Study group members identified the implications of not addressing priority issues. These included continued incidence of family breakdown, decreased workplace productivity, and increased incidence of violence in families, schools and in society. Programs which are short-term and which don't address the underlying causes were viewed as "band aid" solutions which are ultimately more costly, both in human potential and financial terms.

Study group members saw benefits of action to be improvements such as more responsible citizens, families and communities with the skills and resources to support themselves, and a healthier, more productive society. They projected positive effects in financial savings on physical and mental health care, and decreased demands on the variety of social systems needed to help those who are dependent.

*"I was very pleased it was not just professionals and government agencies etc., but available to the ordinary citizen for their input."*

*-Conference participant*

*"The interaction (in study groups) between professional/non-professional, urban/rural was super"*

*-Conference participant*

*"It is sometimes good to talk to people with whom you agree to disagree."*

*-Conference participant*

## Study Group Areas

The 23 study groups produced a total of 77 priority issues. There was some overlap among issues where more than one study group addressed a particular topic. With the consolidation of these overlapping issues, 48 priority issues were developed in the nine study group areas. The issues are not necessarily listed in order of priority.

### Study Group A: Balancing Work and Family Life.

Three groups each explored their four highest priority issues. The overlap of issues among the groups was consolidated, leading to the following five:

- A-1. **Awareness and Attitude must be improved.** It is important that the workplace recognize and learn to adapt to changing family realities, and understand that this is not just a women's issue. There must be increased public awareness of the value of children to society and the need to support parents raising children;
- A-2. **The workplace should address family needs,** including issues such as dependent care, parent leave, flextime, affirmative action. There should be flexible and varied employee assistance plans to address differing needs of employees;
- A-3. **Fairness in all aspects of the system is needed,** whether parents stay at home or work. Those who try to become more independent must not be penalized in the transition. Flexible benefit packages would allow employers to respond to the diversity of family needs;
- A-4. **A review and reevaluation of the role of government and employers is required,** to ensure that both are assuming

*"I feel we have been remiss in what we have expected from families in social adjustment to the revolution going on in organizational life ... business, industry and government have passed on their enormous burden of adjustment to the family ... the expectation on the family for adjustments has gone too far. As the next decade will be one of increased organizational turmoil, the demand for adjustment will increase. Something must be done at the front of the problem and not, as is typical, after family breakdowns have occurred.*

*-Marjorie Blackhurst,  
Blackhurst & Baptist  
Enterprise, Inc.*



responsibilities which are appropriate to the current situation. There must be increased business awareness of day care and parental leave, as well as more empathy towards parents and children; and

- A-5. **Increase support resources in the community** available to working parents, through increased involvement and support of volunteers.

### Study Group B: Families and the Community.

Three groups explored a total of 10 issues. The overlap of issues among the groups was consolidated, leading to the following seven:

- B.1 **The community must be empowered.** Economic and education strategies are required, as well as approaches which allow communities to plan, develop and implement decisions in concert with family and community needs;
- B-2. **More linkages and coordination are required.** A community's resources must be identified so that more coordination and less duplication will occur. There must be linkages between physical, economic and social planning, and there is a need to do better at determining the social consequences of economic priorities;
- B-3. **A working definition of family and of community is required;**
- B-4. **Changes in personal and family expectations are needed.** Personal responsibility must be nurtured in individuals and families by supporting self esteem and self reliance;
- B-5. **Workplace support for families is required,** including job sharing options, understanding of family needs, training programs, etc.;

*"We have the resources within our own community to heal ourselves and we don't need to be sick to be better.*

*We are the resources.*

*We can support and heal one another.*

*And we can help ourselves -*

*to a more healthful and happier society -*

*to a more caring community -*

*to more wonderful families."*

*-Jean Forest,*

*Conference*

*Co-chairperson*

*"It's an old saying that you cannot have a good sailor if they only have to sail on good seas ... If kids never have to face risk, never have to confront pain, fear, loneliness, frustration, they cannot possibly develop adequate levels of self control. What we tend to do as a society is try to make it possible for kids to live their lives without having to face fear and uncertainty - and in the process we imprison them..."*

-Ken Low

Action Studies  
Institute

- B-6. An integrated family policy is needed, to provide benchmarks on the impact of decisions and policies on the family; and**
- B-7. There is a need to build support for prevention programs.**

### **Study Group C: Supporting and Strengthening Families.**

Five groups explored a total of 18 priority issues. The overlap of issues among the groups was consolidated, leading to the following eight:

- C-1. A family policy grid must be established, against which public policy would be evaluated and refined to support the family. It is important to review the integrated impact of Federal, Provincial and Municipal policies and legislation to ensure that they do not inadvertently work against families or each other. It is essential to create a positive economic and social environment where families can thrive;**
- C-2. Individual family members must be empowered and encouraged to accept responsibility; they need education and support to deal with the stresses and expectations of family living;**
- C-3. Children's and adolescents' mental health services must be enhanced;**
- C-4. Resources and support are needed for the family unit. This includes flexible considerations for tax and pension benefits, as well as workplace support such as on-site day care and part-time benefits. Poverty is an especially destructive force on families and requires attention;**
- C-5. A shift toward prevention is necessary;**
- C-6. There must be an increased acceptance of the diversity of families and family**

structures. There is a need to engage the community in supporting all families; regardless of race, age, creed, physical environment, ability, sexual orientation, or income level. Families must not be inappropriately labelled;

- C-7. A definition of family is needed; and
- C-8. Support for groups with special needs must be recognized and addressed - i.e., support for Metis, Native and Immigrant families for example.

#### **Study Group D: Learning for Living: Strategies for Promoting Family Development.**

Three groups explored 10 priority issues. The overlap of issues among the groups was consolidated, leading to the following six:

- D-1. Lifelong learning, or education as a lifelong process must become more valued and practiced;
- D-2. The community should be the focus for providing support. Promoting more "neighbourly" support and assistance will help relieve the burden on agencies. The community will require encouragement, training and leadership skills to take on this role in a greater way. Support is required for marriage preparation and parenting courses, programs to relieve language and cultural isolation and counselling, in addition to follow-up support;
- D-3. Prevention needs to be enhanced;
- D-4. Individuals must be empowered, to allow more choices. This includes education, information and resources. A wellness/strength model rather than a medical/illness/deficit model is important when evaluating individuals' capacities and needs for assistance and in developing programs;

*"...empowerment represents 'a respect for the inherent wisdom of ordinary people, an acceptance of a variety of family forms and styles as valid, a sensitivity to cultural and ethnic differences, and a focus on strengths rather than problems' (Anglin)."*

*- Lyle Larson  
Sociologist, U. of A.*



*"Although the statistics reveal that the majority of Alberta's families are relatively prosperous, we must also be cognizant of the significant number who live in poverty. The increase in the number of children receiving Social Allowance attests to the steady growth in the numbers of children of poor families. The fact that children living in poverty face considerable risks is evident in the correlations between low incomes, infant mortality, and child health and welfare status."*

*-HSP Humanite Services Planning Ltd.*

**D-5. Coordination and cooperation among services (including government and volunteer) is essential; and**

**D-6. Research is needed into programs designed to help and support families - both exploratory and developmental.**

### **Study Group E: Financial Health and Families.**

Two groups explored the following five priority issues:

**E-1. Policies of the taxation and pension systems must be assessed to ensure that they support strong family functioning.** Concern was expressed that such programs may inadvertently work against families. This includes issues such as deductions at source, maintenance support and treatment of stay-at-home spouses;

**E-2. Funding of social programs should be changed to incorporate an increased emphasis on prevention, and should honor individual initiative and sense of worth.** Funding should ensure a basic income and support not only for those on social assistance, but also for the working poor;

**E-3. Policies must be related to the cause and prevention of inequalities, to break the cycle of poverty through education and support.** More research and education on the characteristics of social allowance recipients and the working poor is needed;

**E-4. The declining financial health of families, particularly single parent female heads, needs attention.** Restructuring of social service programs to meet the changing needs and diversity of families is required. Some resolution of this issue could be achieved by examining the causes and dimensions of poverty in Alberta with

recommendations for action to eliminate poverty. People who are experiencing the problems should be involved in developing solutions. Community development in economically disadvantaged communities and media opportunities to broaden public awareness and support for building healthier communities are also potential strategies; and

- E-5. All government programs, services and legislation should support families. A family impact statement, as well as a set of objectives and principles to guide the government in reviewing and designing programs and legislation to meet the changing needs and diversity of families would be of assistance.

#### Study Group F: Health and Families.

Two groups explored eight priority areas. The overlap of issues among the groups was consolidated, leading to the following seven:

- F-1. Better communication is needed between government departments to ensure groups such as the mentally ill are not left to find their own way through the bureaucratic maze, and to ensure reduction of unnecessary duplication and competition for resources. This relates especially to health, education, and social services, and includes the agencies funded by and associated with these departments;
- F-2. Family involvement in health education for students should be enhanced;
- F-3. There needs to be more accessibility to a wide range of community based health care services, including alternate health related services. Outlying areas must have access to treatment and prevention services

*"Most things that impact health happen outside the health care system and have mostly to do with our sense of control over our environment.*

*...The Healthy Communities Project is a mechanism to solve some problems in the community in order to make it a healthier place, in the broadest sense. More importantly, people get an understanding and an experience of how they can control things in their environment."*

*-Susan Berlin*

*Canadian Healthy Communities Project*

*"Values are patterns of energy. The seven elements (raised by Dr. Garbarino) all tie into - how do we pattern our energy ... how does our pattern of energy reflect that we love our children? What are our family rituals? How do children get a sense of belonging to something greater than themselves?"*

*-Maggie Hodgson,  
Nechi Institute,*

through approaches such as mobile services;

- F-4. There needs to be an increased focus on health promotion and disease prevention, including rewards and incentives for being healthy and well. A multidisciplinary approach to health promotion has the most likelihood for success;
- F-5. Recognition and support for family caregivers is important for strong family functioning. Respite support, as well as community-based education, incentives and programs in all aspects of family life are required;
- F-6. Healthy public policy is needed in such areas as a Children's Bill of Rights, food labelling, the environment, and healthy workplaces as well as with respect to day care standards and availability. Family policy, programs and legislation should be reviewed; and
- F-7. Family violence must be addressed through such strategies as education for judges, lawyers, police, teachers, and agency staff; and more support groups and shelters for victims.

#### **Study Group G: Families and the Education System.**

Two groups explored seven priority issues. The overlap of issues between the groups was consolidated, leading to the following five:

- G-1. Children must be provided the education that will enable them to meet the needs of today and tomorrow. An emphasis should be placed on educating students for their role as responsible, ethical decision makers;
- G-2. Education is a shared responsibility of the child, family, school and community



groups (such as police, churches, community leagues, businesses, taxpayers, etc.). We need to develop "organic" partnerships which share common goals to meet the needs of each individual child. Grass-roots consultation and input should replace top-down planning;

- G-3. The quality and appropriateness of education programs** needs to be improved and equitable access to these quality programs needs to be ensured. Better quality and more appropriate programs could be achieved through involvement of the parent, student and teacher in defining programs and ensuring accountability, through teacher training and teacher support, and through programs to introduce educational programs to parents. The issue of equitable access should not be considered solved solely by distance education;
- G-4. The roles and responsibilities of the school and families on moral issues** need to be clarified. Parents want to have more access to teaching materials, as well as more forums between teachers and parents; and
- G-5. Resources for education can be optimized and improved**, by reducing duplication and encouraging voluntary contributions. Communication and understanding of the roles and contributions of all parties is required, in order to improve coordination. The contribution of businesses and parents to the education of children should be recognized. Such strategies as tax credits for businesses who support partnership programs could be utilized. Communication departments for school boards should be established to enhance relationships between schools and the community.

*"Adults present themselves as powerful role models for children when they are observed using learning as a tool for change. As children come to understand that the continuous change around us produces the need for continuous behaviour change, they begin to see learning as a tool for coping with everyday situations, for increasing individual well-being and for enhancing personal empowerment."*

*-F. June Morgan*

*F. June Morgan  
Enterprises Ltd.*

## H. Families and Leisure.

*"... leisure, balance, joy and families. Families need permission to be spontaneous. The pace in our society is increasing rapidly, so it's even more critical to lighten up."*

*-Bob Woodburn,  
RETHINK Inc.*

One group explored the following three priority issues:

- H-1. An awareness and ability to choose wisely from a variety of leisure opportunities, both structured and unstructured, can be created by introducing education and lifestyle practices early in life. Such education must be available to all ages and abilities, and should focus on family groupings rather than only on individuals;
- H-2. Access to leisure opportunities must be improved, through strategies such as more parks in urban areas, rural/urban exchanges, more resources for operating costs, and more effective promotion of available leisure opportunities; and
- H-3. Advocacy and lobbying is important, both to promote the development and provision of leisure for all Albertans, and to ensure strategies are implemented. Advocacy is also needed on behalf of groups who have been inadvertently excluded from some kinds of leisure activities and in support of improved marketing and education programs.

## Study Group I: Families and the Law.

Two groups explored five priority issues. The overlap between the groups was consolidated, leading to the following three:

- I-1. There is need for a new Family Law Act, and a reconstruction of the legislation pertaining to family law. Existing proposals in Alberta and elsewhere on support, children and cohabitation need to be reviewed. Action needs to be taken to

- ensure a unified comprehensive approach to the modern family, and a more humane approach to Family law;
- I-2. Definition of the family is necessary to** define responsibilities and rights of 'family members', reduce gender inequality, and make the law, programs, and services more appropriate to today's society. Consideration must be given to the child, biological parents, step parents, adoptive parents, grandparents, adults in the house, and significant adults to the child; and
- I-3. Public education and awareness of family laws are needed.** This could be provided through forums such as the school system, adult education courses, workplace information, and a centralized information bank.

*" ... the current legal situation of Alberta families (relates to) the obligations and rights of family members and to family reorganization following marital breakdown. The nature and scope of the legal issues affecting Alberta families and their members ... include: the rights and status of children, adult dependent family members and elderly family members; matrimonial property rights and inheritance; marriage breakdown; mediation; property division; support of spouse and child; and custody and access."*

*- Peter Lown, M.L.  
(Marnie) McCall and  
Joseph P. Hornick,  
Institute for Law and  
the Family*



*"This conference was planned, not as an end in itself, but as a beginning. A beginning that involves all Albertans. It is the beginning of a renewal that will strengthen our families and our future. ...It is a transition that demands that we reflect on the very meaning and role of families in our lives today. And it demands that we develop a new partnership - a new partnership based on unity, based on trust and commitment and working together in harmony."*

*-John Oldring,  
Minister,  
Alberta Family and  
Social Services*

## Themes

In assessing all of the issues of the 23 study groups, eight themes emerged that cut across all study groups. Each of the priority issues discussed by the study groups fits within one or several of these eight themes:

- 1. A need to respond to changing cultural values;*
- 2. A stronger focus on prevention;*
- 3. Recognition of the importance of balance between work, leisure, and family responsibilities;*
- 4. The benefits for families from coordination and linkages between programs, and a partnership of all groups and individuals with the families they serve;*
- 5. A need for responsive systems and a change in design and functioning of systems to address current and future social situations;*
- 6. The need for community involvement and community empowerment;*
- 7. The recognition of the need for lifelong learning; and*
- 8. The critical need of families to have financial health as well as skills and knowledge in order to be strong and successful in this society.*

These themes form the basis for the Agenda for Action for the Premier's Council in Support of Alberta Families.

## 5. Agenda for Action for the Premier's Council in Support of Alberta Families

The Premier's Council in Support of Alberta Families was established to act in an advisory capacity with respect to government policies, programs and services which may impact on family life in Alberta. Specifically the Council will:

1. seek practical advice from all Albertans on how Government can strengthen the family;
2. recommend ways Government can encourage the partnership between the community services components of public, private and volunteer agencies and institutions;
3. assist in creating public awareness on matters of interest and concern to families;
4. advise the Minister on impacts on the family associated with proposed Government initiatives; and
5. assist the Government with other activities deemed important by the Minister.

The conference was designed to provide the first step in this consultation process by identifying the issues of priority which form the Agenda for the Premier's Council.

The Council will use a variety of strategies to get input, including regional symposiums, town hall meetings, written briefs or submissions, and one-on-one discussions between Council members and Albertans they meet. Where it deems appropriate, the Council may arrange for research into particular topics.

Through the Council, Albertans will make recommendations to the Premier on those strategies

*"I make a commitment to families in general, and to all members of families - mothers and fathers, husbands and wives, daughters and sons, uncles and aunts, brothers and sisters, cousins, stepparents, grandparents, foster parents ... my commitment is to do everything I can to serve and to see that Alberta families are strong, are happy and everything they're intended to be."*

*-Stockwell Day,  
M.L.A.,*

*Chairman, Premier's  
Council in Support of  
Alberta Families*

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and solutions best undertaken by government. The Council will recommend and advocate to the private sector and communities, the strategies and solutions best undertaken by those sectors.

**Agenda for Action**

The discussions in the conference raised many issues for the agenda of the Premier's Council. The issues trigger a number of questions, which have been set out here to assist in the examination of each agenda item.

It is these agenda items that the Premier's Council in Support of Alberta Families, and Albertans collectively, must explore and debate. It is in grappling with these and other questions that Albertans will address the challenges that lie ahead, and develop options and strategies to strengthen and support families.

***1. How can we best foster cultural values that match the current and future social environment so that families can thrive?***

Cultural values must reflect the reality and acceptance of diversity of family types and structures; a broad definition of families is needed. Multiple program delivery models will ensure that a wide variety of programs fit the range of needs for services. Equitable treatment of all must be ensured. Recognition of the importance of children, support for parents' roles; a focus on strengths in families and communities rather than just on needs and deficits; and recognition of a changing environment and openness to change are required. Myths about "ideal" families must also be dispelled - the role of television and the educational system are critical in this area.



- What myths about families do we hold that are no longer valid? How do we become more accepting of diversity? Can we raise community awareness of the need to support all families, recognizing that families take many forms?
- How do we change from a focus on illness and deficit to a focus on wellness and strength?
- How do we change the stigma about learning all through life about being an effective parent, spouse and family member?
- How do we bring people to an openness and acceptance of change? How do we empower and encourage individuals to accept more responsibility?
- What measures can be implemented in the workplace in recognition of the changing realities for families?
- How do we encourage people to appreciate more fully the value of children to society?
- What is the role of schools? of the media?

***2. How best do we address the desire to give attention to more preventive services for families without jeopardizing the necessary rehabilitative and treatment services?***

Services and supports to families which focus on growth and development as well as problem avoidance/minimization need to be given increased attention. A health promotion/community development approach to strategies is also important. Supporting individuals and families to function as independently as possible should be the objective of any intervention. Criteria for resource allocation are critical, since the current system appears to place greater emphasis on child welfare and protection systems than on helping parents fulfill child rearing responsibilities. Money and support services are more readily available to assist with child rearing

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when a child is removed from the family than to help parents carry out this task within the family context.

- Do we incorrectly think of prevention as only "before" and rehabilitation only "after", instead of thinking of serving people in a way that allows them to function as independently as their capacity will allow?
- Can we develop a perspective where prevention and rehabilitation are not either/or, or a battle for fixed resources?
- How do we find a way to make prevention as much a priority as treatment and rehabilitation?
- Can we justify spending money and energy on programs which might help someone sometime down the road instead of helping people who are clearly in crisis right now?
- Do we have enough information to assess which types of prevention services really work?

***3. What mechanisms and workplace supports must we put in place to make it easier for Albertans and Alberta families to have a balance of work and leisure?***

Balance in work, leisure and other activities is essential for well rounded individuals. The role of women as primary caregivers and the implications for their families as a result of dual careers needs to be addressed. The needs of the workplace and the importance of increased productivity will be best met through a balanced approach, which considers the need for decreased stress for family members who have caregiving responsibilities.

- How best can we create awareness and ability to choose wisely from a variety of leisure opportunities?

- Can we develop creative ways to improve access to leisure opportunities?
- Do poor families have the necessary access to leisure activities?
- How best do we address the role of women as primary caregivers and the implications for their families as a result of dual careers?
- If workplaces will benefit, in terms of increased productivity, should employers play a bigger part in ensuring a balance of work and leisure? If so, what role would be appropriate? What other supports, such as dependent care, parental leave, flextime, employee wellness programs etc., need to be put in place?
- How can flexible and varied employee benefit and assistance plans to address differing needs of employees be most effectively implemented?

***4. How best can we create a social consensus which will assist communities, service agencies, and all levels of government to work cooperatively towards a common goal of supporting families?***

The extent of professional specialization and institutional segmentation has resulted in duplication of services and poor collaboration and cooperation. A social consensus or shared vision would assist everyone in working toward common goals. There should be a greater reliance on neighbourhoods and community resources to reduce the burden on agencies. More networking is needed of information and resources to avoid reinventing the wheel'.

- What kinds of mechanisms and linkages are needed to improve coordination? Would more coordination save resources, or would we spend more on the coordination? Is there really excessive duplication?

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- How can we identify community resources and make everyone aware of their existence so that the necessary linkages will be made?
- What interpersonal skills do we need to develop in order to work in partnership with each other?

***5. How should the systems which impact families respond to address changing realities and ensure that policies support and strengthen families?***

Systems must be responsive to families rather than focusing on the needs of the system - i.e., the systems must have a 'customer focus'. In order to ensure responsiveness, attention must be given to criteria such as system flexibility, capability of serving diverse family needs and structures, and equitable access to services. Services must be effectively integrated and coordinated so that people do not 'fall between the cracks'.

There is a need to assess the impact on families of policies, laws, and programs developed at Federal, Provincial, and Municipal levels. Programs, services, and laws must be designed and delivered with the needs and characteristics of families and their social environment at the forefront. A restructured system of family law that reflects current societal needs is critical.

- How, specifically, should we change the design and function of the social services, health, education, recreation, economic and tax systems so they focus more on supporting the family than on the system?
- Can we make changes, (for example in opening and closing hours of schools as well as agency and government offices), to reflect the realities of diverse family schedules and availability to easily access services?
- What should be the relationship and

responsibilities of families, government, employers? How can we ensure accountability in the systems?

- Do our policies, programs or services inadvertently act against some families or some particular groups, such as stay-at-home parents?
- How can we ensure these systems are predictable and efficient while still being flexible in responding to a diversity of clients?
- How do systems remain open to change? What education and training is needed for professional and volunteer service providers?
- How can governments and agencies become more customer-focussed?
- Do we need a definition of family? What are our objectives in defining the family - do we need different definitions for different purposes?
- What changes are needed to family laws in order to address the diversity of families and meet their changing needs?
- Where do we put our time, energy and financial resources for the greatest benefit of all? How do we balance the needs of one special group with the needs of another?
- How can we best address the special needs of Metis, Native and Immigrant families?
- What level of children's and adolescents' mental health services are needed and how should these services be coordinated?
- What level of supportive resources must be available in the community? What are the options for identifying community resources?
- What is the most effective way to evaluate the social consequences of economic priorities?
- What public policy on the family is needed? Is an integrated family policy practical? If so, how is it best developed and implemented?

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*6. How can we invest energy and resources in the empowerment of communities in their essential role in supporting families?*

Grass roots input in the development and implementation of programs and services for families is increasingly important. The design and delivery of programs to promote the well being of families and to prevent family breakdown should be a shared responsibility of governments, communities, families and individuals. There is a need to identify resources within the community which support families and to develop strategies to more effectively mobilize those resources. These resources include volunteers, self help initiatives, support services, funding, education and improved networking, all of which contribute to caring, resourceful communities.

- What do we mean by 'community'.
- In what ways can communities be empowered? Would it be acceptable to have different programs and different levels of services in different parts of Alberta as a result of communities indicating what services they needed?
- What linkages would be required at the local level to ensure integration of physical, economic and social planning?
- What resources would communities need to enable them to contribute more to planning and resource allocation? What changes in procedures, as well as training and education would be required at the provincial level to assist administrators in changing to a new way of operating?



**7. *To what extent can we create an environment where Albertans are open to change and growth, and seek out opportunities for lifelong learning so they can function effectively in a changing environment?***

People need to grow and change in order to continue to function effectively in a changing environment. Opportunities and supports must be provided to assist individuals to solve their own problems - whether through public education and awareness, information and resources or other forms of support which promote improved self esteem and ability to take responsibility for solving their own problems and making positive lifestyle choices. Professionals and administrators must continue to learn and stay alert to changes in their field.

- What does lifelong learning mean?
- What kind of learning opportunities for adults are needed? Is there a need for more programs? Is the issue one of motivation? Is there sufficient support for individuals to participate in adult education activities?
- Should we require people to take courses in marriage, family relationships, parenting? Should the government set standards for adult learning opportunities that relate to family relationships, parenting skills, etc.?

**8. *How best can we ensure that families have the skills and financial health they need, in order to be strong and successful?***

The strength of the family and the strength and vitality of the society are interdependent. Institutions in society are reliant on individuals with skills, knowledge, health, emotional maturity, personal power and responsibility. These individuals are created by strong families with the support of

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communities and institutions. Families depend on financial support from productive workplaces which contribute to and depend on a vibrant economy. All these systems must support and reinforce each other in positive ways.

Strong financial status is associated with educational achievement and good health. Family members' earning power, their ability to manage their financial resources wisely, and the safety net we have in place to ensure adequate financial resources for the family are all critical to the strength and vitality of our society.

- How do we help family members develop skills, knowledge, health, emotional maturity, personal power and personal responsibility as well as earning power?
- How best can we help children to develop the knowledge and skills to meet the needs of today and tomorrow and to be responsible, ethical decision-makers? What are the roles of schools, families and the wider community?
- Is sufficient attention being given to prepare people for their role and responsibility in a marriage relationship and as parents?
- How can families learn to turn out not just human resources, but resourceful human beings who can find their own way?
- Do families and family members need an ally or advocate to speak for them at the strategic policy level? Do we need a Children's Bill of Rights or a body like a Family Rights Commission?
- How broadly should the financial safety net for Alberta families extend?
- How do we best grapple with poverty and its widespread effects? What are the root causes of poverty and how can we affect them?
- How best can we help vulnerable groups to identify their resources and to use them to

begin to help themselves?

- What financial and non-financial support should we provide to family caregivers?

## Conclusion

This report of the conference establishes the Agenda for Action for the Premier's Council in Support of Alberta Families, and provides a discussion paper for the exploration of issues with Albertans throughout the province. The Speech from the Throne identified the need to keep Alberta families strong. The involvement of all Albertans in recommending strategies and solutions to support and strengthen Alberta families was the vision behind the establishment of the Lieutenant-Governor's Conference and the Premier's Council in Support of Alberta Families.

The Lieutenant-Governor's Conference was a vision realized by The Honourable W. Helen Hunley. As we move forward to discuss and explore the issues critical to Alberta families today and into the future, let us remember her words in opening the conference:

*"Ladies and Gentlemen, our families mean many things to us.*

*They are where we learned about the world around us and our role in it.*

*They are where we developed the skills and attitudes that allow us to succeed in life.*

*Through them we developed as a province and faced the challenges of our past.*

*And, through them we will meet the challenges of the future."*

*"The ultimate success of this conference cannot of course be assessed at this time. The proceedings have met and even surpassed our expectations, but the ultimate success will depend, not upon the proceedings themselves, but upon the initiatives that are undertaken and that are implemented as a result of these proceedings. Only when we can look back on them, in place and working, will we know that we've really climbed that mountain."*

*-Jean Forest,*

*Conference  
Co-chairperson*



## 6. Bibliography

Anglin, J. 1989. *"Parenting and Parent Support: New Understandings Lead to Innovative Programs."* Transition, December: 6-7

Eichler, M. 1983. *Families in Canada Today: Recent Changes and Their Policy Consequences.*, Toronto: Gage Publishing Ltd.

Stinnet, N. and Defrain, J. 1985. *Secrets of Strong Families.* New York: Berkley Books.

Study papers for the conference are available by writing to:

Premier's Council in Support of Alberta Families  
c/o Family Initiatives Division  
Alberta Family and Social Services  
10th Floor, 10030 - 107 Street  
Edmonton, Alberta  
T5J 3E4

Tapes of workshop sessions are available for sale from:

Kennedy Recordings  
RR #5, Edmonton, Alberta  
T5P 4B7

### **Changes in Alberta Families.**

Information on this general topic is found in the study paper *"Families Today: Change, Diversity and Challenge"*, by Susan A. McDaniel.

### A. Balancing Work and Family Life

Information on this topic is found in the study paper *"Balancing Work and Family Life"* by Mary Woodbury; and workshops A1 *"Every Family is a Working Family"* (Alan Mirabelli), A2 *"The Workplace and its Impact on Families"* (Marjorie Blackhurst), and A3 *"Child Care Revisited"* (Kathleen Gallagher Ross).

### B. Families and the Community

Information on this topic is found in the study paper *"Families and the Community"* by Lyle Larson; and workshops B1 *"Role of the Community in Family Life"* (Susan Berlin), B2 *"Families and Community Planning"* (Walter Jamieson), B3 *"Today's Families"* (Susan McDaniel), and B4 *"Impact of Cultural Values"* (Ulmar, Ross, LeGrange and Cardinal).

### C. Supporting and Strengthening Families

Information on this topic was presented in the study paper *"Supporting and Strengthening Families"* by Michael W. Goldstein; and workshops C1 *"Families, Government and You"* (Couchman & Norquay), C2 *"Families as Caregivers"* (Dianne Kieren), C3 *"Supporting Vulnerable Families"* (Dawn Walker), C4 *"Ethics, Values and Family Traditions"* (Chad Gaffield), and D5 *"Our Children - Our Future"* (Ken Low).

### D. Learning for Living: Strategies for Promoting Family Development

Information on this topic was presented in the study paper *"Learning for Living: Strategies for Promoting Family Development"* by F June Morgan; and workshop D1 *"Promoting Family Development"* (William S. Griffith).



### **E. Financial Health and Families**

Information on this topic was presented in the study paper *"Alberta's Families: Financial Health Status Report"* by HSP Humanite Services Planning Ltd.; and workshops E1 *"Poverty and its Impact on Families"* (Ruth Berry), and B2 *"Individual Responsibility for Financial Planning"* (Elaine Barnes).

### **F. Health and Families**

Information on this topic was presented in the study paper *"Health and Families"* by Joel Christie; and workshop F1 *"Promoting Healthy Lifestyles"* (Priscilla Koop).

### **G. Families and the Education System**

Information on this topic was presented in the study paper *"Families and the Education System"* by Mary Woodbury; and workshop G1 *"Complementary Roles: Schools, Families and Communities"* (Susan J. Ditchburn).

### **H. Families and Leisure**

Information on this topic was presented in the study group *"Families and Leisure"* by Jarmila Horna; and workshop *"Leisure, Balance, Joy and Families"* (Bob Woodburn).

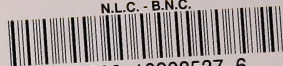
### **I. Families and the Law**

Information on this topic was presented in the study paper *"Alberta Law and the Family"* by Lown, McCall, & Hornick); and workshops I1 *"Family Obligations: The Law"* (Cruickshank, Robertson, & Davies) and I2 *"Family Reorganization: The Law"* (Pask, Ziff & Flatters).





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